

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Virtual Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, March 16, 2021, Virtual Meeting, 7 P.M.

Zoom Participants/Attendees (in bold)

Regular (voting) members: **Dale Chayes, Bob Farra, Zanna Gruber** (Chair), **Joe Holmes, Aaron Moore, Bruce Rachman, Laurie Ullmann, John Watlington** (Vice-Chair), **Joe Will** (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) members: **Jon Campbell**, Andy Gatesman, Josh Haines, **Everett Kenerson, Philip Keyes**, Gary Kilpatrick, **Mel Lima**, Jim Salem, Jason Temple, Todd Tsakiris

Others:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT President)

Opening

Zanna opened the meeting at 7 p.m. with eight voting members, Dale, Bob, Zanna, Joe H, Aaron, Laurie, John, and Joe W present. Zanna read the script provided by the Town for remotely-conducted open meetings.

Regular Business

Review and approval of February 16 minutes

Approval of the minutes was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously by roll call.

Citizens' concerns

None

New/Special Business

Possible trail link with Carlisle update

This was settled at the March meeting. Bob has no additional feedback.

How to address trail NIMBY (stemming from Bob's work w/Carlisle)

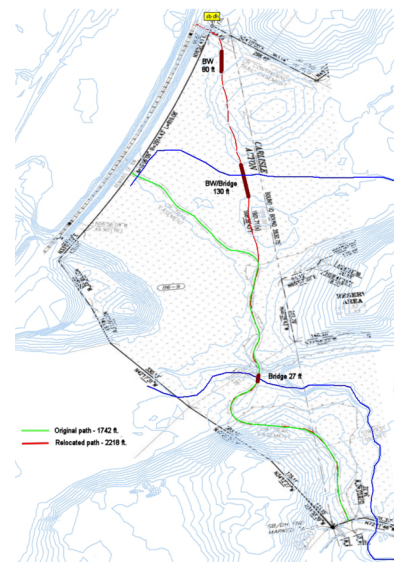
This is carried forward from Bob's report at the March meeting based on his experience with the Marshall Path/Canterbury Hill residents regarding a possible trail in their neighborhoods.

- The Dog Park Committee has experienced NIMBY with every possible site that it considered that had neighbors. There still is no NIMBY resolution even with a dog park site having been selected.
- What were neighbors' objections to the new trails next to Carlisle? Bob reviewed several reasons: concerns about safety, trail entrances and exits, proximity to homes, trails passing in between homes and behind their backyards, presence of strangers, street traffic, narrow streets, on-street parking (therefore even narrower streets), people and delivery trucks presence on streets, a need for new trails with a host of trails already behind the neighborhoods, removal of trees, encroachment on wildlife. Also, there was not enough support from either the Robbins Mill Conservation Trust or the Marshall Crossing Condominium Trust for approving the several proposed entrances and easements. Without such approvals, the remaining trails would not accomplish much.
- A logical, valuable trail would be one that goes into Carlisle and ties into a significant trail in Carlisle.
- There is such a trail today — one in Robbins Mill that goes behind the neighborhoods, and into Carlisle's Ben's Woods.

- The intent of this agenda item is not so much to review reasons for NIMBY, but to talk about instances of what has worked to overcome NIMBY objections; what socializing has been done to get people to go along with “in my backyard” proposals.
- There is a huge body of knowledge on NIMBY issues — a rabbit hole that goes very deep. If the LSC is interested, it should have something like a subgroup to analyze this and bring findings to the Committee.
- Is anyone interested in being on a subgroup about NIMBY issues? Unanimous silence.

Valentine land

Laurie met on zoom with Steve Tobin, Chair of the Carlisle Conservation Foundation, other Carlisle folks, and the lawyer for the owner/developer of the Valentine land about “closing the gap” on the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) in Acton by revising the original easement across the land from the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) to Acton Street/Carlisle Road. From there, BCT hikers would proceed to the Carlisle Road parking for the Robbins Mill trail to Wheeler Lane. Laurie had expected to hear more from Steve by tonight, but nothing yet. A tentative plan is to move ahead on working out a possible change in the easement to make it easier for the owner to sell home lots on the land. The original idea was to sell the lots and then negotiate with individual owners. Who would determine a change in the location of the easement? Not sure. The original easement was set in the will of Betty and Jack Valentine. When Jack died, the Valentines didn’t want any changes in the will, and the land is now set up so house lots can be sold by the developer. It happens that the Valentines were close friends with Phil and Phil is willing to speak on LSC’s behalf with any family member who may still be involved.



If an easement change does not work out, there are two fallbacks.

1. Keep the current “temporary” BCT along the BFRT to the Nashoba Sportsmen’s Club, to Main Street, to Carlisle Road.
2. Use the original easement that includes a difficult vertical connection with the BFRT and some significant wetlands crossings. Laurie will keep the LSC updated on this.

(The accompanying illustration (undated and not shown at this meeting) is shown above for illustrative purposes. It shows the portion of the Valentine that is in Acton. The BFRT, on the east side of Main Street in North Acton, is in the upper left. The original easement for the BCT is shown in green. A proposed easement that would simplify easement access from the BFRT is shown in red). Towards the south, the easement crosses into Carlisle and exits the Valentine land at Acton St/Carlisle Rd.)

Land Stewards’ Field Guide

Bettina coalesced several sources, sent the work to Jim Wright and John for editing (still waiting to hear from Jim), and will send the current version to everyone, hopefully for comments. It should be on next month’s agenda.

Morrison Farm/Ag Comm update

Joe W screen-shared a proposal from Acton’s Agricultural Commission for 1) establishing a conservation restriction on the entire 32 acres of the farm (except for house and barn), and 2) selling the house and barn to a yet-to-be-organized non-profit group, “Friends of Morrison Farm”, that would care for both buildings going forward. Lots of people are attached to the beauty of both buildings in the farm setting but the buildings need to be cared for. Being owned by a non-profit instead of the Town makes the buildings much more economical to maintain, and it’s possible that the Friends could rent the barn to the town on a yearly basis for equipment storage, thus creating a revenue source that could help with building upkeep.

Discussion points:

- Has anyone looked at the barn? When they say “renovate”, they may mean that you let the building fall down and build something else in its place.
- Building inspectors and other various people have looked at it. It can be rebuilt but the extent of work involved has to be updated. It’s not thought to be a tear-down rebuild, but it could be. It’s a stick-built barn, not post-and-beam.
- In addition to the house and barn, there are ancillary structures that should be cleaned up.
- The town is looking to repair the structure where it puts mowers and things.
- The horse shed behind the pump building is well on its way to collapsing, say within another year or two.
- There is no talk about the rest of the outbuildings. They would remain town owned and the town would have to figure out what to do with them.
- The proposal would go out to most boards and committees as the Ag Comm is seeking input. That will take several months. Based on that feedback, The Ag Comm would hope to create a warrant article for Town Meeting. Town Meeting would have to approve selling the buildings to a non-profit.
- Morene Bodner, Chair of the Ag Comm, would spearhead putting together a non-profit.

CPC update

Joe W screen-shared a page showing CPA applicants, names of their projects, and requested amounts. The total requested in the Historical Resources category (\$64,646) is probably a “sure thing” because Historical Resources is guaranteed 10% of the 2021 funding. The total amount requested is about \$2.2M (there is also a request to help cover administrative costs), while about \$1.7M is available, so the CPC has to cut about \$500K from the requests. Re the two items that are related to LSC interests, the Pencil Factory bridge is likely to get its first-year Phase 1 Design request of \$44K. If it does, there will be a request next year for \$250K for bridge construction. The second request of interest to the LSC, for Open Space, could be getting more than the \$400K it requested. The biggest CPC issues are with Recreation projects. The completion of the Sports Pavilion at NARA (the inside of the east building) and the River Street work are likely “sure things”. The Jones playground and Elm Street tennis courts are perhaps in the most jeopardy. There will be significant debate about the Gardner Playground and the Dog Park. The CPC meets again next Tuesday and will begin its deliberations on award amounts.

Additional Regular Business

Covid19-related issues

None.

Parcel issues

• Nashoba Brook

The boardwalk is temporarily repaired. Bruce Rachman fixed the boardwalk last weekend. All stringers are rotten. The T straps connecting the stringers are disintegrating. The sills are old utility poles that should be replaced. Bob Guba built it in the early 90s, so we’ve gotten our money’s worth out of it. Low-water time in the summer or fall will likely be the best time for permanent repairs. We’ll do an assessment, come up with a lumber list, and have a workday.

• Guggins Brook, Heath Hen Meadow

The Nashoba Brook boardwalk is the “tip of the iceberg”. There are a lot of boardwalks, including major ones — the Grassy Pond boardwalk, the bridge at Heath Hen Meadow (HHM) — needing attention. We need to replace hundreds of feet of boardwalk per year.

– Bettina wrote a \$29K grant to the State for replacement of the HHM boardwalk. The State should let Bettina know in April if it will award the grant. In the meantime, the boardwalk is holding its own.

– Matthew Chytil is doing a boardwalk rebuild on the upper blue trail at Guggins. Fortunately, a lot of Eagle Scouts come through and bring their own funding and that really helps.

– If something needs to be done urgently, let Bettina know so she can put together a lumber list, get a price, and put together workdays.

- Grassy Pond

The Grassy Pond long boardwalk (originally built with prison-farm labor) will have to be rebuilt in a couple years. We did have a plan to look at it last summer. Then Covid happened and interrupted the process. Hopefully we can look at it this summer and come up with a plan for rebuilding.

– We'll have a workday Saturday morning, 03/27 at the Grassy Pond meadow. Bettina will get volunteers.

- Great Hill

John had wood chips delivered to Great Hill and is trying an experiment: Getting people who use the playing field to spread the wood chips on the trails. The second volunteer didn't read the instructions too well and simply spread them around, so John put up another sign that's a little more empathic. He has also added a wheelbarrow so the task is a little easier.

– Reminder: We have lot of people on a volunteer list who really want to help. Instead of having random folks, consider having an hour and a half workday with people who can dedicate, with some supervising, to one project. Bettina can send out word to the volunteer list on how they too can help with the wood chips at Great Hill.

- Workdays

Joe H and Bettina advised on how they run workdays during the pandemic.

Website issues

The Trail Through Time (TTT) tab has been updated. Intern Abby Beilman typed all the TTT message boards into a Word file. Her work went to Peg Sestrich, our website guru, who created links for them. Go to the TTT site for links to the different TTT stops. Eventually, they will also show photos. Next Monday, Bettina and Vivian Birchall of Acton TV will create a TTT walking tour video for folks who can't get to the TTT. There will be a link to the video on the TTT page.

Maps update

Joe H shared the map of Great Hill showing the recently-purchased Magoon land as part of Great Hill. Per Bettina, the Open Space Committee is talking with the owner of the only private land over which the trail heading east from the playing field passes to connect with the Magoon parcel, looking for a way to make that trail segment "legal".

Next month's (April 20) agenda

- The Land Stewards' Guide
- An invasives presentation with Jim Snyder-Grant
- Notify Joe W and Zanna with any other items.

Evaluate meeting

"Well done Madam Chair."

Phil: Is there any way to speed up the presentation of the preamble that opens the meeting? Probably not because of Open Meeting Law. Bettina will check with the Town Clerk as to whether it can be shortened.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, April 20, at 7 p.m.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Draft Meeting Minutes of February 16, 2020